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A Comparative Study on Public-Hosted Blog Sites In the U.S., China, and Korea

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ABSTRACT

In the context of blogs, online trust plays an important role in connecting the author and readers. We identify that online interpersonal trust is reflected in the user profile of a blogger by how much personal information he or she reveals in it. With three public blog hosting sites chosen from the U.S., China, and Korea, we first conducted a comparison analysis on blog hosting website interfaces to identify cultural characteristics of them. We then investigated levels of online trust of bloggers from three different cultures, by analyzing their willingness to reveal self-reported personal information in user profile. Results show that bloggers in the U.S. reveal more information in their profile than ones in China or Korea, which indicates higher levels of interpersonal trust.

INTRODUCTION

Online Trust and Blogging

- A blog is used to share their diary and personal experience, and interesting topics and community experience (Krishnamurthy, 2002; Bar-Ilan, 2004).
- To do so, bloggers must express high levels of interpersonal trust towards the readers who often remain anonymous.
- In this study, we identify that online trust is reflected in the user profile of a blog by how much personal information a blogger reveals in it.

Online Trust and Culture

Trust affects actions that may be highly dependent on users' respective cultural context (Volken, 2002, Hall, 1976; Wurtz, 2005).

- Low context and individualistic culture: explicit, high propensity to trust
- High context culture: implicit, low propensity to trust

RESEARCH QUESTION AND HYPOTHESIS

Research question

To assess level of online interpersonal trust across three cultures in the blogging community.

Hypothesis

Based on the U.S. being a high trust culture and China and Korea being low trust cultures (Fukuyama, 1995; Park, & Wiedenbeck, 2005), we predict that:

Bloggers from the U.S. reveal more personal information in the self-reported user profiles than bloggers from China and Korea.

METHOD

Three blogging sites in three different cultures are selected:

U.S.: blogger.com
China: blogcn.com
Korea: blog.naver.com

Step 1: Compared the initial webpage of the three blogging sites (Figure 1-3) to determine cultural characteristics.

Step 2: Compared available fields in user profile from three blogging sites.

Step 3: With 40 individual blog samples randomly chosen from each culture, compared percentage of self-reported personal information in user profiles



Figure 1. Interface of the U.S. Blog Hosting Site



Figure 2. Interface of Chinese Blog Hosting Site



Figure 3. Interface of Korea Blog Hosting Site

| | The U.S. | China | Korea |
|-----------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Blog Hosting Services | http://blogger.com | http://blogcn.com | http://section.blog.naver.com |
| Type of Blog | Topical | Topical | Topical |
| Language | Multi-lingual | Chinese | Korean |
| Culture Context | Low Context | High Context | High Context |
| Individualism | A link to Privacy, current news, log-in feature | log-in feature | A link to Privacy, current news, log-in feature |
| Power-Distance | - | Symmetric, tall hierarchies, and highly structured access categories | Tall hierarchies and highly structured access categories |
| Uncertainty Avoidance | Simple design, no need for scrolling, limited choices, search feature | Redundant cues and links, search feature, real-time blog info | Redundant cues and links, search feature |
| Long-Term Orientation | Links to friends | A great deal of information, Links to friends | A great deal of information, Links to friends |

Table 1: An Interface Comparison in Three Cultures

RESULTS

1. Comparison of User Interfaces (Figure 1-3)

- U.S.: limited information and choices.
- Korean: more features & categories than the U.S. blog hosting site
- Chinese: the most number of links, features, and information.

2. Comparison of the User Profile Fields

Culture-universal fields (8 fields):

- title of the blog, nickname, gender, age, self-photos, location, hobby, link to other blogs.

Culture-specific fields

- U.S. (11) [contact info](#), [blogging since](#), [intro](#), astrological sign, zodiac year, interest industry, occupation, favorite movie, favorite music, favorite book.
- Chinese(3) [contact info](#), [blogging since](#), [intro](#)
- Korea (2) real name, personality

The highest number of self-reported fields in a profile is a result of American culture being more open and trusting.

RESULTS - continued

3. Comparison of Sampled User Profile (Figure 4-5)

The eight culture-universal fields of a 40 different set of profile are analyzed.

In Figure 4:

- Title and link to others are unanimously revealed by the systems for all cultures.
- The field of nickname is revealed by almost all bloggers (US 100%; CN 92%; KR 97%).

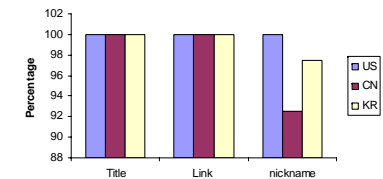


Figure 4. Profile analysis for title, link, nickname

In Figure 5:

Chi-square test on percentage of bloggers revealing their personal information across three cultures:

- American bloggers: reveal the most amount of personal information (high trust)
 - ✓ Significantly higher than CN on all fields
 - ✓ Significantly higher than KR on gender and age
- Chinese bloggers: reveal the least amount (low trust)
 - ✓ 14% on Gender, 0% on Age & Location
- Korean bloggers: (medium trust)
 - ✓ highest on hobby, 29%
 - ✓ Significantly higher than CN on all fields
 - ✓ Similar to US on self-photo & location

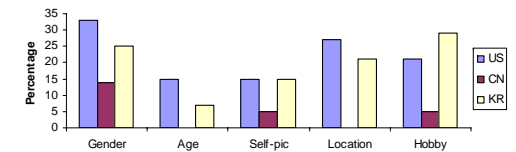


Figure 5. Profile analysis for gender, age, self-picture, location, and hobby

CONCLUSION & FUTURE RESEARCH

Our preliminary results identified interesting cultural differences regarding online trust

- American bloggers reveal more personal information in the self-reported user profile than Chinese and Korea bloggers.
- Korea bloggers show more cultural similarities to Americans than to Chinese.

Future research:

- collect larger sample data for our future studies.
- Multidimensional approach, integrating content analysis, interviews, and user profile analysis, will help us to understand the interplay of online trust and culture better.